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**Lead Smelter Owner Will Buy Homes***Associated Press, Friday, March 22, 2002, 11:13 EST*

ST. LOUIS (AP) -- The owner of the nation's largest lead smelter has agreed to buy 160 nearby homes, the most dramatic step taken so far to protect the community's children from pollution.

After six hours of negotiating Thursday night, Doe Run Co. and state officials agreed on immediate buyouts of 26 homes near the smelter in Herculaneum where children under 6 live, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported Friday.

More than half the children that age who live within a half-mile of the smelter had high levels of lead in their blood, according to a map released by the state Tuesday. The buyout does not cover all those children, but it covers most.

Overseen by the Environmental Protection Agency, Doe Run has spent millions cleaning up the yards, homes and streets of Herculaneum, a town of 2,800 people about 30 miles south of St. Louis.

It was not determined when the company will offer to buy the other 134 homes, but company executives said they would schedule a community meeting within the next two weeks to announce further details.

The planned buyouts cover most of what was once central Herculaneum, bounded on the east by the smelter near the bank of the Mississippi River. A man who lives in the buyout zone with his young granddaughter said the news came as a great relief after months of worry.

"I'm glad they thought enough of the children to get them out of this mess," said Dennis Shore, who lives about two blocks from the smelter. A recent blood test showed his 3-year-old granddaughter, Madison, had lead levels nearly twice the federal standard for lead poisoning.

Because of contamination, many Herculaneum homeowners say their houses are valued at a fraction of what they paid for them.

Stephen Mahfood, director of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, said Doe Run and the state agreed to offer homeowners the "fair market value" for their properties. But officials have not said whether that meant the current value, the value before the discovery of lead pollution, or something in between.

In recent weeks, Mahfood, Gov. Bob Holden and House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt have discussed the possibility of temporarily shutting down the smelter or forcing Doe Run to buy homes. The 160

TGS

Site:	Herculaneum
ID#	MOD006266373
Break:	2-0
Other:	3-22-02

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SUPERFUND RECORDS

planned buyouts are voluntary.

Gephardt met Thursday with EPA officials to urge them to put the site on its national priority list for Superfund money. He said after the meeting that he would support closing the smelter if the company didn't make progress in its cleanup.

Doe Run spokeswoman Barb Shepard said the company has done the right thing.

"We think we've come up with a very good plan to make things right," Shepard said.

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